



Suffolk Refugee Support Autumn 2019 Newsletter

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We're keen to make sure the people we support can access the beautiful Suffolk countryside, and above members of our International Women's Group show their love for Flatford during a recent visit as part of the national Landscapes for Life Week. Many thanks to the Dedham Vale AONB for organising such a wonderful trip. See page 3 for news of more events and outings.

Our inspiring manager, Rebecca, has dedicated nearly 20 years to helping refugees and asylum seekers rebuild their lives, so we were thrilled when she received an Honorary Fellowship from the University of Suffolk recently. Rebecca said: "I am accepting this award on behalf of the many refugees who have fought against unimaginable adversity to make this county their home, whilst remembering the many others who have lost their lives in the conflicts of the world." Read more [here](#) and [here](#), and more on SRS awards on page 4.



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SRS 20th Annual General Meeting



We held our 20th Annual General Meeting recently, looking back over another highly challenging but rewarding year and celebrating the achievements of some of those we are fortunate enough to work with. Nearly 100 friends and supporters of SRS gathered to hear from an ESOL student and volunteer of ours who won Suffolk's Outstanding Learner of the Year award, an Egyptian refugee we supported who is now working as a broadcaster in London, a Syrian lecturer at the University of Essex who recently swam the English Channel to raise awareness of refugee journeys, and a young Sri Lankan poet who writes of hope for the future. Thank you to all who attended and showed such support for refugees in Suffolk. We couldn't do our work without the strength and encouragement of all who were present.

Among the speakers we were privileged to have at our AGM was Dr Zeina Alsharkas, a lecturer in the Department of Economics at the University of Essex and originally from Syria. Zeina was a national level swimmer in her home country, and recently became the first Syrian woman to swim the English Channel solo. She did so to symbolise her hope that one day "all refugees can choose their direction in their lives". You can watch the [highlights of this amazing feat here](#). Zeina is pictured right with Rasha, who has been an invaluable part of the SRS team but is leaving us for pastures new (see page 4—we're including her twice because we miss her already!)



Annual Report

As we mark 20 years of supporting refugees in Suffolk, our [2018-19 Annual Report](#) is out now, with updates from all our projects and areas of work, news of awards and recognition that we and our clients have received, and quotes and case studies from people we have supported over the last two decades. It shows that our Advice Service alone delivered more than 6000 individual contacts to refugees and asylum seekers from 35 countries in the past year, supporting more than 1100 people in total. The report also reflects how Suffolk Refugee Support and the people we work with have become an important part of the local community, and gives a timeline of our first 20 years. We would like to say a huge thank you to all those whose support has made this possible.

Suffolk Refugee Support
Annual Report
2018-2019



20 Years of Supporting Refugees 1999-2019



In 1999, Suffolk Refugee Support was set up to provide assistance to refugees and asylum seekers in Suffolk. Over the years, people fleeing situations of conflict and human rights abuse around the world have come to our door for support. Often we have been the first friendly face and listening ear they have found. Twenty years later, SRS has gone on to support thousands of people. We have grown with the demand for our services and today run a wide range of projects supporting people to rebuild their lives in safety.



I want to thank you and your amazing team for such a great birthday party for SRS. It was such a happy occasion... and it was very special to have so many of the people you have helped over the years there and for the rest of us to see for ourselves just what can be achieved with kindness and the right guidance.
(Roz Emtison, High Sheriff of Suffolk)

EVENTS

Summer might seem a distant memory now, but the holidays were full of events and outings for us and our clients. As well as the trip to Dedham Vale/Flatford (see page 1), we took a group of families (from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Sudan) to see the 'Theatre in the Forest' production of Romeo and Juliet. The families had a great time and enjoyed looking round Jimmy's Farm. A big thank you to the Red Rose Chain theatre company for their support with this. Thanks also to Suffolk Artlink for arranging a fantastic Circus Skills Workshop (pictured above right) and Art in Aldeburgh for their art session with refugee families. Finally, thank you to Suffolk Wildlife Trust, Suffolk Constabulary and Sudbury Police Station, and the Green Light Trust for all their help in arranging summer activities for unaccompanied asylum seeking children and young refugees.



Fundraising thank yous!



Despite 20 years of successful service delivery, our funding situation is more precarious than ever. So we are enormously grateful to both the Royal Hospital School in Holbrook (who chose us as one of their charities of the year) and Ipswich School (who fundraised for us and provided other support such as transport and learning space) for their incredible donations to our work. This will make a real difference to our ability to continue delivering vital services to vulnerable refugees.

Work with local schools

We continue to support local schools to raise awareness of refugee issues and experiences. We were particularly pleased to take part recently in the Dora Love Prize induction day, organised by the [University of Essex](https://www.essex.ac.uk/) to help schoolchildren understand the links between the Holocaust and intolerance and hatred today. We delivered workshops to 250 students from 23 schools across Suffolk and Essex. We were also hugely touched by the work done by pupils and teachers at Wood Ley Primary School near Stowmarket to design welcome cards for refugees (pictured right).



Resettlement programme update

Our [Refugee Resettlement Programme](#) is **urgently looking for private landlords** willing to rent properties to resettled refugees who have been in the UK for 18 months – 2 years. This is an important step for families, for whom a stable home is so important, in rebuilding their lives. It also frees up programme properties for new arrivals and helps Suffolk meet its commitment to resettle vulnerable refugees from Syria and elsewhere in the Middle East and North Africa. We are looking for a range of privately rented family homes in Ipswich, in particular 4-bed and 3-bed properties. All families can provide a recent landlord reference, but many are unable to provide a guarantor. If you might be able to help, please contact Lisa: lclarke@suffolkrefugee.org.uk



Could you make a real difference to a family who have been through so much?

Do you have a house to rent?

Would you consider renting your property to a refugee family and helping them to rebuild their lives in Suffolk?

Please contact - Lisa Clarke at Suffolk Refugee Support: lclarke@suffolkrefugee.org.uk



Elsewhere on the resettlement programme, we are very sad to say goodbye to the wonderful Rasha, who has worked with us for two and a half years and whose sense of humour, compassion and calmness under pressure will be missed enormously. She is going to work with resettled refugees in Cambridge, alongside Zeid, a Syrian refugee who arrived in Ipswich under the resettlement programme and who has also worked for us as a Trainee Support Worker. Congratulations to both on the new roles!



We're very proud that two resettled refugees that we supported have recently begun university in the UK—we know how hard they worked to achieve this and are delighted that they are finally able to resume their studies. We have also seen several resettlement clients successfully gain volunteer placements at local cultural institutions, such as museums and theatres, through a joint project with our friends at Volunteering Matters. Look out for more on this soon!

SRS awards and recognition

We are delighted that in our 20th anniversary year, SRS as an organisation as well as individual staff and clients have received so many awards and other recognition. In addition to our manager, Rebecca, receiving an Honorary Fellowship and being joint winner of the Inspiring Leader of the Year Award, we are [shortlisted for Charity of the Year at the BME Business Awards](#), organised by the Bangladeshi Support Centre in Ipswich, and Jodi, our amazing Employment & Training Advice Worker, received a certificate from the High Sheriff of Suffolk in recognition of all her dedicated employment work with refugees.



SRS in the media

Among the people we support through the refugee resettlement programme are Kurds from Northern Syria, who are deeply worried about the current situation back home. One couple spoke to BBC Suffolk about the desperate situation their family are experiencing, suffering injuries, homelessness and food shortages. You can [listen again here](#) (1:18:10 in, until 16 Nov). We also featured on the Sunday Breakfast show on Radio Suffolk recently, with the winner of the Inspirational Learner of the Year Award speaking about her faith and learning English with us. [Listen again here](#) (1:10:00 and 2:11:50 in, until 11 Nov). Finally, we loved [this piece from BBC News](#), using visual data to explain why record numbers of people are fleeing their homes.

We hope you've enjoyed our latest newsletter—we'd love to hear from you with your feedback or if you'd like to find out further information. If you received this newsletter indirectly, and would like to join our mailing list, please email our administrator: mwalker@suffolkrefugee.org.uk

Thank you again for all your support, donations and volunteering - we really couldn't manage without you!